



## Partnerships for Better Governance: From Dictatorship to Democracy

### The Challenge



Capital improvement working group of Iasi Metropolitan Development Area established with USAID assistance

As Romania emerged from years of communist rule, citizens and officials strived to learn about democracy. Most successful democracies sustain and renew themselves through an open dialogue between three

principal actors: the government comprising competing political parties, private business, and civil society made up of a rainbow of voluntary associations of citizens. This dialogue is then reported on and actors

held accountable through a free and responsible media.

Immediately after the revolution in 1989, many of the key institutions that sustain a free and open democracy did not exist in Romania.

The government had been in the hands of one political party for decades, opposition parties did not exist. Politicians knew little about representing the interest of their constituents, having been accountable only to the communist party bosses for decades.

Civil society did not exist, and people were suspicious and very reluctant to associate with each other. The police and security services were not interested in defending and preserving citizens' rights and liberties.



Public hearing on local budget organized with USAID assistance

### The Response

With American assistance, Romanians focused on reducing the grip of the central government, opening the government to public scrutiny, and building the foundations of civil society. They established institutions that protect human rights, resolve disputes, assist those with special needs, bring citizens into the discussion of public issues, and prepare the younger generation for the responsibilities they will face.

Ordinary citizens were encouraged to give financial support to the non-government organizations of their choice, and a new culture of philanthropy was promoted through corporate social responsibility, community involvement and social participation.

It was crucial to assist parties across the political spectrum to become more professional and effective and to create the practice of regular communication between

members of the parliament, their constituencies, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

U.S. advisors assisted in modernizing the judiciary and fighting corruption.

Authorities received assistance to strengthen local government, make public administration more open and transparent, and grow the dialogue between civil servants and citizens.

Another priority was to encourage independent mass media. Many young journalists participated in study tours in the U.S. followed by consultations with American advisors in editorial management, marketing, advertising sales, and market research.

## The Results

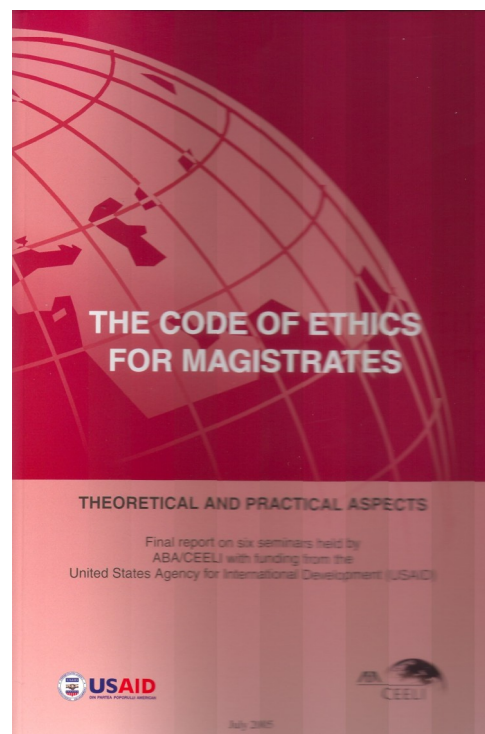
- The law on Local Public Finance (1998) and amendments to the Law on Local Taxes and Fees (1997 and 2002) have resulted in greater fiscal autonomy for local authorities.
- Hundreds of Romanian-American NGO partnerships mobilized communities to participate in solving community issues.
- A network of political activists skilled in party building and electoral campaign management was created.
- More than fifty NGOs have designed and implemented long-term strategies to address the accountability of local and national politicians; citizens' participation in local decisions; fundraising; media responsibility; domestic violence; the rights of people with mental disabilities; access of Roma to education; and, community resource mobilization.
- The "Blue Book," a directory including data on Members of Parliament and the most important government institutions, was published.
- A Constituency Services Manual, the basis for training constituency office staff, was developed.
- National professional associations of local public servants were created to advocate on behalf of their constituencies.
- A national network of citizen information centers was created to respond to citizens' queries on local government activity and procedures.
- The National Institute of Magistrates (NIM) was established.
- Ethics codes for judges, clerks, and prosecutors were published.
- A new law on domestic violence was drafted.
- A new civic organization – Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe) - was established providing training to NGOs and public institutions on how to develop public policies with citizen input.
- The Social Development Fund and the Romanian Association for Community Development were established and are supporting development projects in poor communities.



Website: [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)



The Fiscal Code of 2005 was amended with USAID assistance to allow individual taxpayers to allocate a portion of their taxes to support an NGO of their choice



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